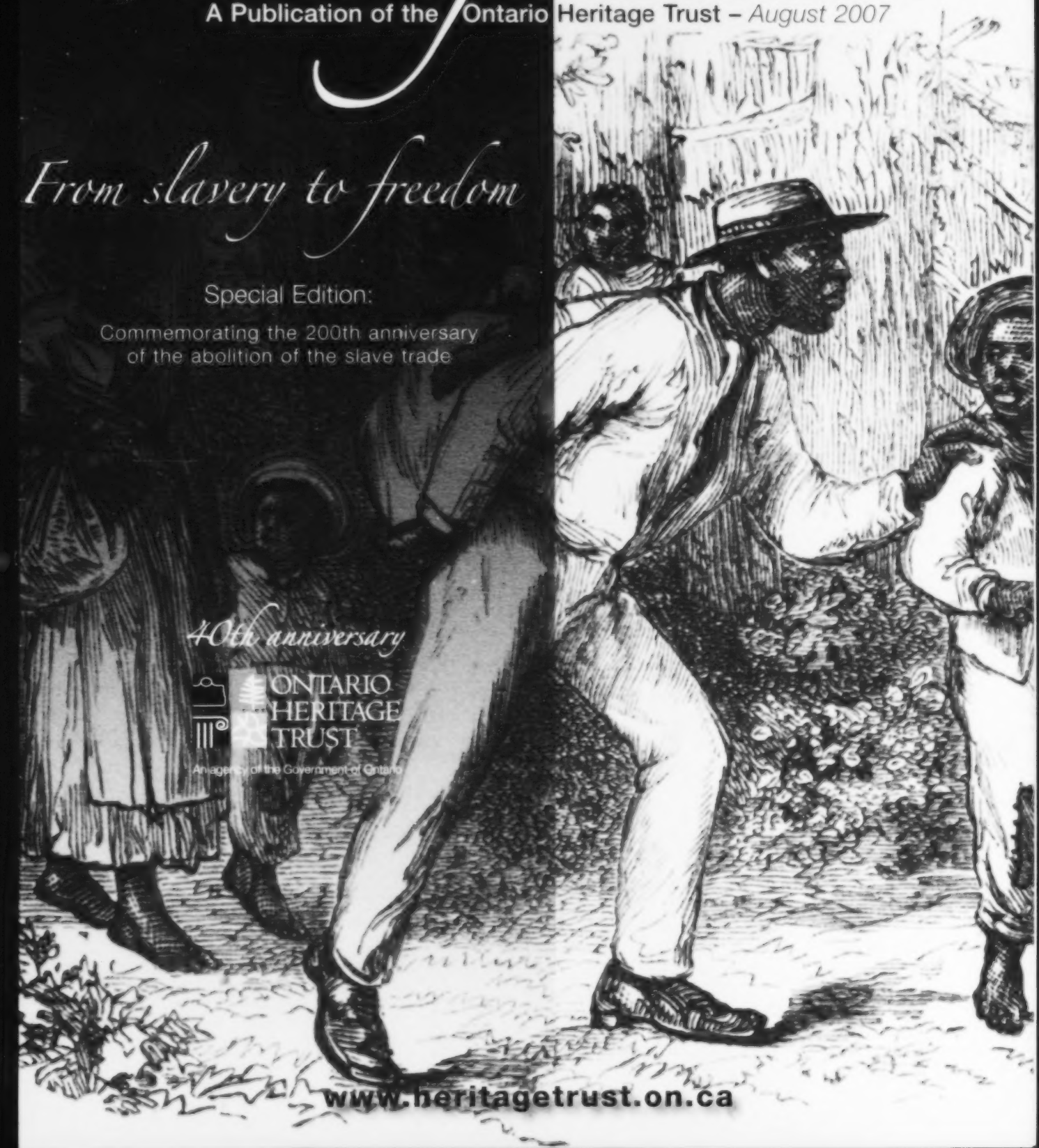
Heritage Matters

A Publication of the Ontario Heritage Trust – *August 2007*

From slavery to freedom

Special Edition:

Commemorating the 200th anniversary
of the abolition of the slave trade



40th anniversary

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

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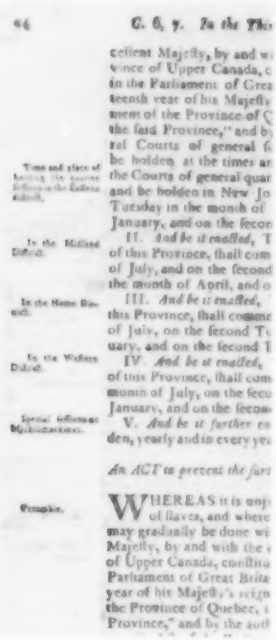
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M E S S A G E



Photo courtesy of Gilbert & Associates, Toronto

The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander, Chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust

This Special Edition of *Heritage Matters* commemorates the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in Ontario. It showcases our province's remarkable Black heritage, tracing a dramatic route from the darkness of slavery to the triumph of freedom.

There are many stories to tell when you think of the Underground Railroad. Whether it's the story of escaping slaves looking for the light of freedom, or people lending their support on this arduous journey – what remains is a legacy of courage that has defined our province.

It is important that we remember these heroes, and honour them. Our young people, too, need role models – from every background, of every colour and belief system – people whose actions and words have helped shape the cultural mosaic we treasure so dearly today.

Ontarians are fortunate to have so many positive examples of heroes – both Black and white – who have fought (and continue to fight) for equality in our province and country. People like Harriet Tubman – who devoted her life to fighting slavery and championing the rights of women; Donovan Bailey – who became the world's fastest human in 1995; my friend the late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau – who introduced Canada's multicultural policy in 1971; and Josiah Henson, a runaway slave who settled in Dresden, Ontario, founded the Dawn Settlement in 1841 and was the inspiration behind Harriet Beecher Stowe's celebrated novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They are all heroes, all pioneers in the fight for freedom, equality and understanding.

We are humbled by their contribution to our society, grateful for their courageous acts and ever-mindful of the battles they fought and the challenges that remain today.

Let us celebrate this rich heritage . . . together. And remember them.

The Ontario Heritage Trust gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration for Trust activities celebrating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade - including the publication of this Special Edition of *Heritage Matters*.

Slavery in Ontario

Slavery – one of the world's oldest institutions, practised in almost every society – became increasingly identified with the Black peoples of Africa because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (1518-1850).

Close to 25 million people were purchased by European slaving powers and deported from their African homelands to work as slaves on the farms and plantations and in the factories and homes of whites in every new world society from Canada to Argentina. The slave trade and enslavement of Africans contributed to European wealth and dominance.

At least 600,000 Africans arrived on the shores of what is now the United States during the height of the slave trade. This number climbed to four million by the start of the 1861 American Civil War. The labour provided by these enslaved Africans helped to establish the United States as the wealthiest economy in the world. Although the northern states abolished slavery by 1827, it continued to grow in the south.

The first recorded instance of African enslavement in Canada dates to 1628 with Olivier LeJeune, a young boy from Madagascar. After this date, slavery in Canada expanded and was institutionalized under the French and British regimes. Many of the enslaved were born in Canada but others came from the United States, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe.

It is a little-known and sad reality that African slavery existed in what is now Ontario. The practice came to the province with the United Empire Loyalists who emigrated here after the American Revolution, many bringing slaves with them.

The Canadian climate, with its short growing season and harsh winters, was not suited to the large-style plantation system of the southern States. Nor was it economically viable to feed and house slaves throughout the winter. As a result, most slaves in Ontario filled domestic roles – cooks, butlers and servants in the homes of the wealthy and elite.

Slavery gradually diminished in Canada. In 1793, after learning of the forcible removal to the United States of an enslaved Black woman named Chloe Cooley, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe passed legislation that prohibited the importation of slaves into Upper Canada and set terms that limited slavery here. Another step towards the end of slavery occurred in 1807 with the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, which prohibited the transportation of slaves but did not abolish slavery. Slavery ended outright with Britain's *Abolition of Slavery Act*, which became law on August 1, 1834, completely abolishing the institution throughout its empire, including Canada. This *Act* meant that everywhere in the British Empire, all Blacks would be considered free persons and have the right to freedom.

Legally, the abolition of slavery put Blacks and whites on equal footing and sent the message that society considered slavery to be morally wrong and something to be fought. Canadian Blacks and other abolitionists continued to defend Black rights in Canada through education and demonstrating against American slavery, by working to improve the condition of life for Canadian Blacks through schools and successful Black settlements, and by taking up arms and serving in the "Colored Corps" – a Black militia unit.

With the abolition of slavery, many African Americans also began to view Canada as a haven from slavery in the southern United States, and racism and discrimination in the North. Canada offered protection to refugees from slavery and set legal precedents that denied extradition requests for slaves.

Over 30,000 Blacks made it safely to Canada via the Underground Railroad – a secret network of free African Americans, sympathetic whites and First Nations people – during the period prior to the

TO BE SOLD,

A BLACK WOMAN, named PEGGY, aged about forty years; and a Black boy her ſon, named JUPITER, aged about fifteen years, both of them the property of the Subſcriber.

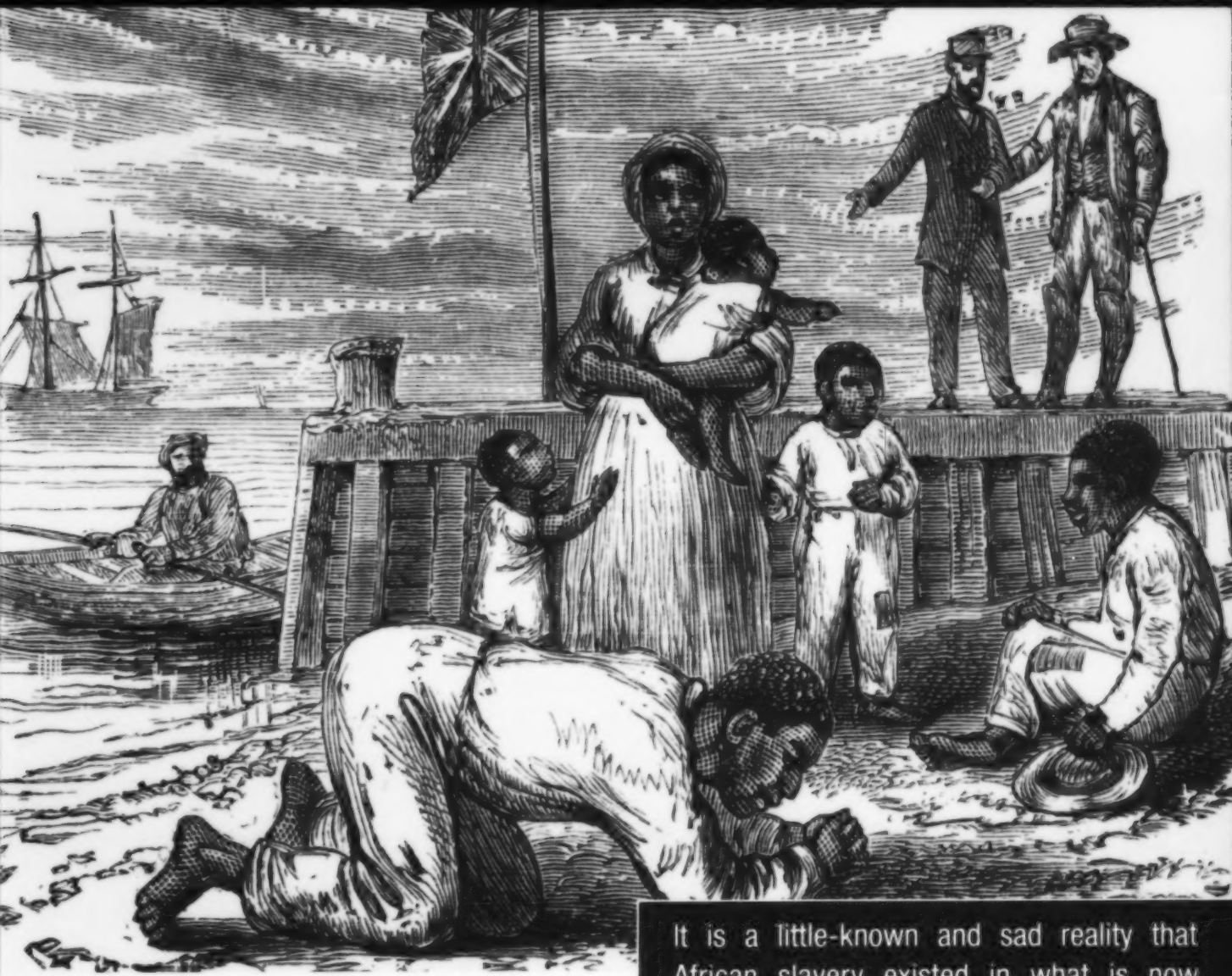
The Woman is a tolerable Cook and waſher woman and perfectly underſtands making Soap and Candles.

The Boy is tall and ſtrong of his age, and has been employed in Country buſineſs, but brought up principally as a Houſe Servant—They are each of them Servants for life. The Price for the Woman is one hundred and fifty Dollars—for the Boy two hundred Dollars, payable in three years with Intereſt from the day of Sale and to be properly ſecured by Bond &c.—But one fourth leſs will be taken in ready Money.

PETER RUSSELL.

York, Feb. 10th 1806.

"To be sold" poster. Photo: Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site



Henson family arrives in Canada. Photo: Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

American Civil War. Its primary objective was to assist runaway slaves on their journeys to freedom. Escape routes led from the American South to places such as Mexico and the Caribbean, but most frequently to Canada. Escapees fled on foot and by coach, train and water. There were numerous routes leading from the southern slave states to the northern US and Canada. Many freedom seekers who came to Ontario settled in the Windsor region and St. Catharines before later moving to other areas of the province.

Slavery in Ontario had a terrible impact on those who suffered under it. As the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to take steps to limit slavery, Ontario has reason to be proud. But neither Simcoe's pioneering *Act* to limit slavery nor the British *Act* that abolished it succeeded in ending racism or marginalization in Canada. Social freedom and equality were more difficult to attain. Yet by facing and overcoming tremendous challenges, many Blacks were able to establish new lives and enduring communities here.

It is a little-known and sad reality that African slavery existed in what is now Ontario. The practice came to the province with the United Empire Loyalists who emigrated here after the American Revolution, many bringing slaves with them.



Based on the research and writing of Dr. Afua Cooper and assistant Neeka Morris, Dr. Karolyn Smardz-Frost and Adrienne Shadd.

TIMELINE TO FREEDOM

3500 BC to 332 BC – Slavery is practised in ancient Egypt as prisoners are sold as slaves

1500s – Beginning of the European slave trade

1605 – Mathieu Da Costa, an African translator hired by Samuel de Champlain, becomes the first Black person to arrive in Canada

1619 – Slavery begins in North America with the arrival in Jamestown, Virginia of a Dutch slave trading ship carrying 20 Africans

1628 – Olivier LeJeune becomes the first recorded slave to arrive in Canada; he was six years old

1793 – Chloe Cooley, an enslaved person, is forced to cross the Niagara River; Black veteran Peter Martin compels Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe to end slavery

1793 – Simcoe's *Act to Limit Slavery* becomes the first anti-slavery act in the British Empire; it prohibits the further importation of slaves into Canada and leads to the gradual demise of slavery in Upper Canada

1807 – Britain abolishes the trans-Atlantic slave trade

1812 – Black volunteers fight under the British flag in the War of 1812 to defend their home in Canada and prevent a return to slavery

1815 – Black veterans of the War of 1812 receive grants of land in Oro Township, creating an early Black settlement

1830 – Josiah Henson escapes to freedom with his wife Charlotte and four children, arriving near Fort Erie, Ontario; Henson goes on to become a leading Black abolitionist and important community leader

1830 – The Wilberforce Settlement, a sizable Black community, is founded by former residents of Cincinnati; the settlement disbands six years later because of poor financial management

1833 – Solomon Moseby, an enslaved person, comes to Canada from Kentucky only to be accused and arrested for stealing a horse from his former owner; during his transportation back to Kentucky, one of the first race riots in Canada breaks out and Moseby escapes

1834 – On August 1, slavery is formally abolished across the British Empire; celebrated annually as Emancipation Day

1837 – Canadian Blacks gain the right to vote

1837 – Black volunteers serve in the "Colored Corps" during the Rebellion of Upper Canada to defend the government and support Black rights

1849 – Fifteen escaped slaves arrive in what is now the Buxton area where Reverend William King purchased land to form a settlement

1849 – Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery and repeatedly returns to the South, travelling the Underground Railroad in reverse to assist enslaved people in their escape to freedom

1849 – *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave* – Henson's autobiography is published

1851 – On January 1, Henry Bibb publishes the first issue of the abolitionist newspaper – the *Voice of the Fugitive* – in Windsor, Ontario; the *Voice* reported on the movements of the Underground Railroad

1851 – On February 26, the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada is founded to "aid in the extinction of slavery all over the world;" this society helped those seeking freedom in Canada and worked to influence public opinion on the topic of slavery

1852 – *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, is first published in book form; it sells 300,000 copies in its first year of publication

1853 – On March 24, *The Provincial Freeman* is founded by Mary Ann and Isaac Shadd; *The Provincial Freeman* was an abolitionist newspaper; Mary Ann Shadd Cary was the first African-American woman to be published in North America

1857 – The ruling in Missouri in the Dred Scott case states that the enslaved in the United States are not humans, but property

1858 – On May 8, John Brown holds a convention in Chatham, Ontario where he plans to overthrow the American government and the entire slave system by means of guerilla warfare; on December 2, 1859, John Brown is executed in Charles Town, West Virginia after his attempted rebellion fails

1863 – Emancipation Proclamation is ordered by American President Abraham Lincoln declaring all slaves to be free

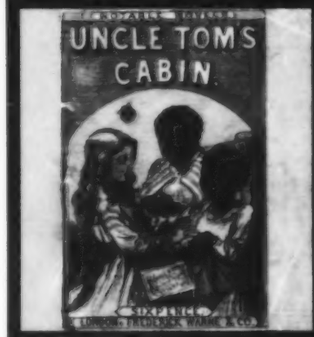
1865 – Thirteenth Amendment officially abolishes slavery in the United States

1922 – Lincoln Alexander is born; he later becomes the first Black Member of Parliament, the 24th Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and Ontario's first Black lieutenant-governor; Alexander is also a member of the Order of Ontario and a Companion of the Order of Canada

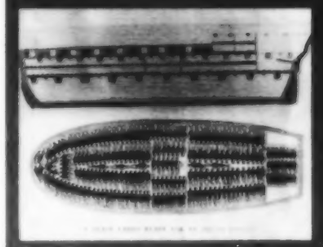
2007 – Bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade



Provincial Freeman masthead
Photo: Archives of Ontario



Uncle Tom's Cabin book cover
Photo: Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site



Slave ship.
Photo: Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site



Main Street, South Buxton.

Featured organizations

Canadian Alliance of Black Educators

In 1979, Oscar Brathwaite convened a meeting of Black educators in Toronto to identify strategies concerning inequity in the Toronto school system. The practice of educational streaming has had an adverse outcome on the life chances of African-Canadian students; inadequate programs in schools, drop-out rates and disengagement are areas of distress.

Experience, qualifications, professionalism, expertise, dedication and the hard work of African-Canadian educators were constantly overlooked and dismissed when system-wide opportunities for career mobility arose in areas of educational leadership and administration. Also, many parents found challenges relating to schools when attempting to navigate curricula and educational expectations. These aspects of career mobility and parental disengagement became catalysts leading to the official establishment of the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE) in May 1980. CABE attempts to address systemic inequities affecting African-Canadian students, staff and parents.

Over the past 27 years, CABE has articulated educational and social concerns of African-Canadian communities. CABE has observed some improvements in assessment, programming and placement of students, as well as a moderate increase of African-Canadian educators in leadership roles in boards of education.

For more information, please contact Kirk Mark, President (Acting), Canadian Alliance of Black Educators at kirkmark@rogers.com.

The Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples

The Harriet Tubman Institute is named after abolitionist Harriet Tubman, a lifelong advocate for African-American citizenship and women's rights. Epitomizing courage and commitment to social change, she conducted over 300 enslaved people to Canada via the Underground Railroad.

The Institute is dedicated to capturing, studying and telling the story of the migration of African peoples around the globe. It preserves and makes accessible official and personal documents, photographs, interviews and maps to enable people to know their cultural heritage, as well as the history of the countries and communities to which African peoples migrated. As an institute of scholars, it also conducts an extensive program of research, publication and post-graduate studies.

The Institute's 25 resident faculty members, based at York University, represents a wide variety of academic disciplines; its international associates represent 24 institutions in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, the United States and Canada.

For more information, visit www.yorku.ca/tubman.

Ontario Black History Society

Founded in 1978, the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS) exists to study, preserve and promote Black history. It is the leading voice in the celebration of February as Black History Month (BHM) – having initiated, nurtured and supported it from local awareness through to a national declaration in Canada effective December 1995 – as well as official recognition for August 1 as Emancipation Day.

The OBHS creates the official OBHS BHM poster, the launch events, the annual BHM brunch and the Emancipation Day celebration. It also: provides year-round presentations and tours; provides a resource centre with library, historic photographs, film, oral history tapes and special collections; creates African-Canadian virtual exhibits (with Historica), mounted exhibits (with Parks Canada) and travelling exhibits (with the Archives of Ontario); offers professional development, conferences and advocacy; and initiates the commemoration of historic people, places and events. In May 2007, the OBHS launched the Centre of African-Canadian History and Culture to provide a place for the expression of our legacy.

Volunteer and sponsorship opportunities abound! Contact 416-867-9420 or www.blackhistorysociety.ca.

Ontario's Black heritage network

Windsor and Essex

John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum and Village

RR 3, Essex, ON N8M 2X7
Phone: 519-727-6555

John Freeman Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum and Village commemorates the journey John Walls took on the Underground Railroad from North Carolina to Ontario. Visitors experience how escaping slaves would have travelled to freedom in Canada at this stopping place on the Underground Railroad. The site also features the original log cabin in which John Freeman Walls and his wife Jane King Walls lived with their nine children. The historic site is owned and operated by the descendants of these courageous pioneer Canadians.

Fort Malden National Historic Site of Canada

100 Laird Avenue South, Amherstburg, ON N9V 2Z2
Phone: 519-736-5416

Fort Malden National Historic Site commemorates the British post of Fort Amherstburg, later known as Fort Malden. This historic site and museum features two exhibit buildings, as well as 1840-period earthworks and an 1819 barracks. Fort Malden offers educational programs when reservations are made, a captioned audio-visual presentation and a gift shop.

Nazrey African Methodist Episcopal Church National Historic Site

277 King Street, Amherstburg, ON N9V 2C7
Phone: 519-736-5433/5434 or 1-800-713-6336

The Nazrey African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was constructed in 1848 by former slaves and free Blacks and provided a place where Black Canadians could worship in their new homeland. The AME Church played a key role in the lives of freedom seekers, often serving as a resting place until permanent housing could be found, then as a school and centre of moral socialization.

North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre

227 King Street, Amherstburg, ON N9V 2C7
Phone: 519-736-5433/5434 or 1-800-713-6336

The North American Black Historical Museum and Cultural Centre illustrates the story of Black migration from Africa to Canada through a series of displays of historical artifacts, documents, various Black heritage exhibits, video presentations and workshops. The facility also includes a research/resource library, genealogical library and archives, and offers guided tours to visitors.

Sandwich First Baptist Church National Historic Site

3652 Peter Street, Windsor, ON N9C 1J7
Phone: 519-252-4917

Sandwich Baptist Church was one of the first stops for many refugees when they entered Canada. Because of its proximity to the United States, the church was also a centre for people trying to keep in touch with, and get updates on, the families and friends they left behind. In 1851, the congregation erected a stone church that still stands and serves a congregation today.

Chatham-Kent

Buxton National Historic Site & Museum

21975 A.D. Shadd Road, CR 6,
North Buxton, ON N0P 1Y0
Phone: 519-352-4799

The Buxton National Historic Site & Museum is dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of the original settlers of the community. In addition to permanent and travelling exhibits of settlement artifacts, the museum houses a library and research centre of papers significant to North American Black history.







Chatham First Baptist Church

135 King Street East, Chatham, ON
N7M 3N1
Phone: 519-352-9553

In 1858, the famous white American abolitionist John Brown visited the First Baptist Church with interested men from the refugee communities in and about Chatham. It was here that they agreed on a provisional constitution for a slave-free state in the United States, and appealed for support for the abolitionist cause. The Chatham First Baptist Church is available for arranged visits by calling ahead. Visitors are also welcome to attend services every Sunday morning.

Heritage Room at the WISH Centre

177 King Street East, Chatham, ON
N7M 3N1
Phone: 519-352-3565

The Heritage Room at the WISH Centre houses a collection of local artifacts, genealogical information and archival materials reflecting the achievements and struggles of Chatham's early Black pioneers. Visitors take a self-guided tour to view a collection of rare books, china and an extensive military collection featuring photos, artifacts and books. Call ahead for a guided tour.

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

29251 Uncle Tom's Road, Dresden, ON
N0P 1M0
Phone: 519-683-2978

Reverend Josiah Henson was a leader in the Underground Railroad community of southwestern Ontario. In 1841, Henson and his supporters purchased 200 acres of land to establish the British American Institute, a vocational school that provided refugees from slavery with the education and skills they needed to become self-sufficient in Upper Canada. The five-acre Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site consists of an interpretive centre, featuring the exhibit *I'll Use My Freedom Well*, three historic buildings, two cemeteries, extensive artifacts and a gift shop.

Niagara Region

Bertie Hall

657 Niagara Blvd., Fort Erie, ON
L2A 3H9
Phone: 905-871-5833

Built circa 1830 by William Forsyth Sr., Bertie Hall served as a safe house for fleeing slaves. Upon arrival at Bertie Hall, fugitives moved to safer quarters farther away from the Canada/US border. The basement of the Hall evokes an authentic experience of the space as it would have appeared as a safe house. The presumed entrance of the secret tunnel is marked and a collection of artifacts tell its story.

Nathaniel Dett Memorial Chapel British Methodist Episcopal Church and Norval Johnson Heritage Library

5674 Peer Street, Niagara Falls, ON
L2G 1X1
Phone: 905-358-9957

The Nathaniel Dett Chapel, a National Historic Site, was built in 1836. In 1983, the Chapel was named after R. Nathaniel Dett, Mus. D. – a renowned musician, composer, poet, choral conductor and former member. This simple structure is still the spiritual centre of the Niagara Falls Black community. It also preserves the region's Black history in the Norval Johnson Heritage library.





North American Black Historical Museum display. Photo: Convention and Visitors Bureau of Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island



Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site



Buxton National Historic Site

St. Catharines

St. Catharines Museum at the Welland Canals Centre

1932 Welland Canals Parkway,
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7K6
Phone: 1-800-305-5134 or
905-984-8880

The construction of the Welland Canal spurred the development of the city of St. Catharines from the early 19th century through the early 20th century. Blacks made a significant contribution as members of the "Colored Corps," a unit of Black militia who kept peace along the canal. The St. Catharines Museum at the Welland Canals Centre includes an outdoor Discovery Park featuring heritage and marine artifacts, exhibit galleries and the award-winning exhibit *Follow the North Star*, which explores the Black experience along the Underground Railroad.

Salem Chapel, British Methodist Episcopal Church National Historic Site

92 Geneva Street, St. Catharines, ON
L2R 4N2
Phone: 905-682-0993

Designated a National Historic Site, Salem Chapel was once a headquarters for the Underground Railroad. It was designed and constructed by Black refugees who cut and hauled walnut timber from Niagara-on-the-Lake, and is traditionally associated with Harriet Tubman who lived in a boarding house behind the church. The lower level of the chapel houses the Harriet Tubman Centre for Cultural Services. The chapel displays artifacts, original documents, ephemera and rare books.

Oakville

Oakville Museum at Erchless Estate

8 Navy Street, Oakville, ON L6J 2Y5
Phone: 905-338-4400

The Oakville Museum on the four-acre Erchless Estate includes the Chrisholm family home, Custom House and two cottages. A permanent component of the museum is an exhibit entitled *Oakville's Black History* – a display that encompasses Black history in Upper Canada as it relates to Oakville, with information on the Turner African Methodist Episcopal Church, which still stands today.



North American Black Historical Museum. Photos Convention & Visitors Bureau of Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island



Grey County

British Methodist Episcopal Church

245 11th Street West, Owen Sound, ON
N4K 6A9
Phone: 519-376-4451

The British Methodist Episcopal Church in Owen Sound was, from its inception, a safe haven for Blacks during the time of the Underground Railroad. Although they were free, Blacks still faced racism and discrimination on a daily basis and the church served as a means of support in a sometimes hostile environment. A church building was erected that came to be called Little Zion, which served the congregation until 1911. The congregation then moved to the 245 11th Street West building, which still serves the Black community today. The church is designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

Grey Roots Museum & Archives

102599 Grey Road 18, RR 4, Owen Sound,
ON N4K 5N6
Phone: 519-376-3690

Owen Sound was a haven for Black refugees. Sympathetic whites provided homes and jobs for the freedom seekers. A Grey County Museum exhibit, *From Slavery to Freedom*, explores the importance of the Underground Railroad to fleeing slaves and the Black struggle to establish new lives as free persons.

Sheffield Black History and Cultural Museum

Rr 3rd Lcd, Collingwood, Collingwood, ON
L9Y 3Z2
Phone: 705-445-0201

Located at the foot of Blue Mountain, this unique museum portrays slavery's reality and also celebrates Black pioneer achievements in Canada, including military and marine history. A huge granite boulder on the grounds is engraved with the names of 56 families who settled in this area between 1850 and 1900.

The Ontario Heritage Trust is proud to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in Ontario. For more information about the Ontario Heritage Trust, visit www.heritagetrust.on or call 416-325-5000.

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

An agency of the Government of Ontario

Researching Ontario's Black heritage

The Ontario Heritage Trust's provincial plaques and local markers reflect Ontario's diversity and speak to the experiences and achievements of the province's cultural communities. The Trust recently expanded its ongoing work to commemorate and interpret our diverse cultural heritage in partnership with TD Bank Financial Group and York University in Toronto. Working with the Trust's professional staff, academics and community partners, graduate students from the Department of History at York researched a number of African-Canadian heritage subjects from across the province as part of this project. Some of these important stories will be commemorated by provincial plaques unveiled by the Trust in 2007 and 2008, with funding support from the Ministry of Citizenship and TD Bank Financial Group.

Black heritage plaques to be unveiled in 2007 and 2008:

- Chloe Cooley and the 1793 *Act to Limit Slavery* (Queenston – see Page 12 for a feature story)
- The Puce River Black community (Lakeshore), a community that remains significant because of its associations with early Black settlement and the struggle for freedom in Ontario
- Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott (Toronto), the first Canadian-born Black medical doctor
- The Black Community in Hamilton, known as "Little Africa," an important Underground Railroad terminus that developed as a community for escaped slaves
- *The Provincial Freeman* (Chatham), a newspaper published from 1853-57, advocating equality, integration and self-education for black people

The Trust is pleased to play a leading role in interpreting and commemorating Black heritage in Ontario and will expand its work in celebrating Ontario's cultural diversity. In addition to our own research, the Trust welcomes applications for provincial plaques from the public. For more information about the Provincial Plaque and Local Marker programs, please visit www.heritagetrust.on.ca.

CHLOE COOLEY AND THE LIMITATION OF SLAVERY IN ONTARIO

This article is based on the research and writing of Colin McCullogh, a graduate student at the Department of History, York University, Toronto

On March 14, 1793 Chloe Cooley, an enslaved Black woman in Queenston, was bound, thrown into a boat and sold across the river to a new owner in the United States. Her screams and violent resistance were brought to the attention of Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe by Peter Martin, a free Black and former soldier in Butler's Rangers, and William Grisley, a neighbour and witness to the event. Simcoe immediately moved to abolish slavery in the new province.

Three years prior, the Upper Canada legislature had passed an *Act* that allowed Loyalists from the United States to enter Canada with their slaves and not pay any duty on them if they obtained a licence from the Lieutenant-Governor. This was done mainly as a way to attract Loyalists to come north, but it also allowed a large number of slaves to be brought into Upper Canada.

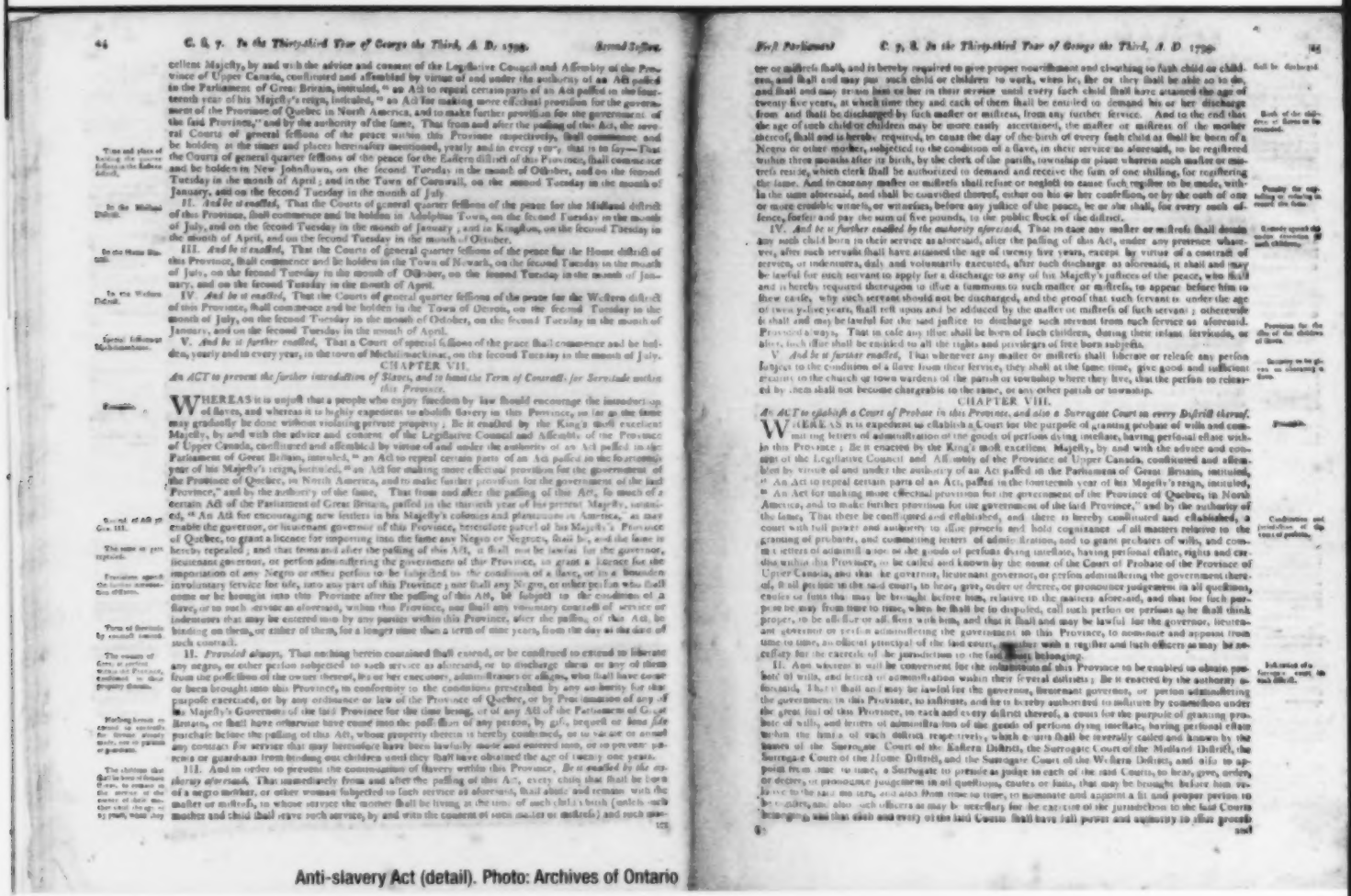
Simcoe championed an *Act* to reverse this allowance after learning about Chloe Cooley. Cooley resisted being sold to another owner in the United States and required more than one man to restrain her. Simcoe used this incident as a catalyst to call for the ban on the importation of other slaves in Upper Canada.

While initially calling for the arrest of the man who had sold Cooley, charges were soon dropped because a case could not be made against the owner, William Vrooman. (Under English Civil Law, slavery was not recognized.) This meant that Cooley had no rights that Vrooman was bound to respect, and she could be sold and treated as any other piece of property. Simcoe's "Act to prevent the further introduction of slaves, and to limit the term of contract for servitude within this province" would make it clear that slavery did exist in Upper Canada and that slaves had a legal status separate from other property.



John Graves Simcoe. Photo: Toronto Public Library (TRL 1516)

Simcoe was known as an abolitionist before his arrival to Upper Canada. In 1790, he had delivered speeches in the British Parliament as member for St. Mawe's, Cornwall, calling for an end to slavery. His attacks focused on the fact that slavery was something that went against the teachings of Christianity and the spirit of the English Constitution. He also called for sweeping, absolute legislation that would end slavery in the colony. The 1793 *Act* represents a



Anti-slavery Act (detail). Photo: Archives of Ontario

compromise that he had to strike with the influential slave-holders of the province. In fact, of the 16 members of the Upper Canada Assembly, at least six owned slaves. Simcoe's personal power, and the fact that a great number of others in Upper Canada despised slavery, helped the *Act* to overcome this opposition.

While it did call for an end to the importation of slaves, the *Act* did not abolish slavery in Upper Canada altogether. Rather, any slaves that were in the province at the time of its enactment were allowed to remain the property of their owners. In addition, any children who were born to slave mothers were to remain the property of their owners until they turned 25.

Simcoe's *Act* also did not find universal support in Upper Canada. After he returned to England in 1798, the legislature tried to reverse the 1793 *Act* and allow any persons entering the colony to bring their slaves with them. A bill was introduced under the pretence of a scarcity of labour in the colony. The bill did not pass, although this does reflect the fact that many wealthy and influential citizens in the colony still owned slaves.

The larger public also played a significant role in influencing opinion and preventing the return of slave importation. Abolitionist movements, often organized through religious groups like the Methodist Church, actively campaigned for the end of slavery on moral grounds. They advocated that it was un-Christian to treat Blacks as pieces of property, and their loud voices helped to inspire the legislators to act against slavery.

Simcoe's *Act* was the first piece of legislation in the British Empire to limit slavery. It set the stage for the great freedom movement of enslaved African-Americans known as the Underground Railroad. Over time, thousands of enslaved persons would use the Underground Railroad to make their way to Canada and freedom. Chloe Cooley's small but brave and significant act of resistance to slavery helped to pave the way to freedom for so many like her.

BLACK HERITAGE IN

Since 1953, over 1,200 provincial plaques have been unveiled to commemorate the people, places and events in Ontario's past. Among these are 16 plaques to commemorate Ontario's unique Black heritage. Individually, each one tells a unique story of tales along the road to freedom. Collectively, however, these accounts weave together a compelling story of Ontario's early Black history.

These people, the places they established and the events to which they contributed helped shape our province's history. Driven by a thirst for freedom and equality, Ontario's Black heritage pioneers remind us that freedom of both body and speech were as important then as they remain today.

Here are their stories:

People

Harriet Ross Tubman (St. Catharines)

A renowned conductor on the Underground Railroad operating out of St. Catharines, Tubman led hundreds of freedom seekers out of slavery in the southern states.



Harriet Ross Tubman provincial plaque unveiling

Mary Ann Shadd Cary (Chatham-Kent)

An American Black, Mary Ann Shadd Cary established the *Provincial Freeman* in Windsor in 1853. She moved this influential newspaper to Chatham two years later. After the American Civil War, Shadd Cary returned to the United States to work for racial equality.

The Reverend Anthony Burns (St. Catharines)

Burns escaped from slavery at the age of 20. Arrested, returned to his owner and then sold, he was subsequently ransomed by a Baptist minister from Boston. Burns himself became a minister in the Baptist Church and led a congregation in St. Catharines.

Richard Pierpoint (St. Catharines)

One of the first Black settlers in the Niagara region, Pierpoint had been enslaved to a British officer. During the American Revolution, he enlisted in the British forces and thereby gained his freedom. A member of Butler's Rangers, Pierpoint settled in the vicinity of present-day St. Catharines.

Lieutenant-General John Graves Simcoe (Devonshire, England)

During his brief term as the first lieutenant-governor of the newly-created province of Upper Canada (1791-96), Simcoe was responsible for many initiatives that helped shape the new province – including an act that limited slavery.

Places

The Buxton Settlement (Chatham-Kent)

Irish-born Presbyterian minister William King came to Upper Canada in 1848 with 15 slaves and founded the Buxton Settlement. Fifteen years later, this burgeoning settlement contained nearly 1,000 freed and fugitive slaves.

First Baptist Church, Puce (Town of Lakeshore)

First Baptist Church in the Town of Lakeshore traces its origins back to the 1840s when the local Black community was established.

The Negro Burial Ground (Niagara-on-the-Lake)

A long tradition of tolerance in Upper Canada attracted refugee slaves to the Niagara area prior to the American Civil War. In 1830, a church and burial ground were constructed by the predominantly Black Baptist congregation.

Old St. Paul's Church & Christ Church (Chatham-Kent)

St. Paul's was the first church in Chatham and the first Anglican church in Kent County. It served the local population, which included members of the Black community and the British garrison.

Otterville African Methodist Episcopal Church and Cemetery (Township of Norwich)

Free Blacks and escaped slaves fled persecution in the United States and found homes in the Otterville area, beginning in 1829. The church and cemetery served the local Black community until the late 1880s.

Sandwich First Baptist Church (Windsor)

This Windsor church was founded by freedom seekers. Until 1847, when they built a small log cabin, the congregation worshipped in homes and outdoors. The present church was constructed from hand-hewn lumber and bricks moulded from Detroit River clay.



African Methodist Episcopal Church and Cemetery provincial plaque unveiling

For more information about these plaques – and others – visit www.heritagetrust.on.ca and search the Online Plaque Guide. Or purchase a copy of *A Guide to Provincial Plaques in Ontario* by calling 416-325-5000 or e-mailing marketing@heritagetrust.on.ca.

The Dawn Settlement (Chatham-Kent)

Born enslaved in Maryland, Josiah Henson escaped to Dresden where, with a group of abolitionists, he established the Dawn Settlement for fugitive slaves. Even after the abolition of slavery, Henson remained in Canada. Today, Henson's homestead is the centrepiece of Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site.

William and Susannah Steward House (Niagara-on-the-Lake)

Former slaves William and Susannah Steward lived in Niagara from 1834 to 1847 when they moved to Galt. The Stewards' modest cottage is an excellent example of local vernacular architecture.



William and Susannah Steward House provincial plaque unveiling



The "Colored Corps" provincial plaque unveiling

Events

The "Colored Corps" (Niagara-on-the-Lake)

Anxious to preserve their freedom and prove their loyalty to Britain, people of African descent living in Niagara offered to raise their own militia unit in 1812. Instead, authorities formed a Colored Corps commanded by white officers. The men saw action during the War of 1812.

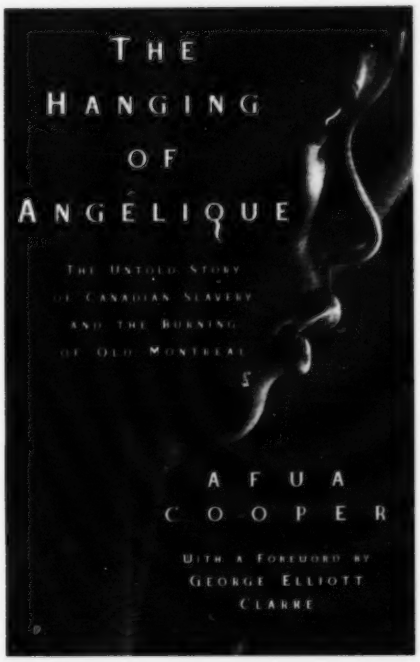
Black Settlement in Oro Township (Barrie)

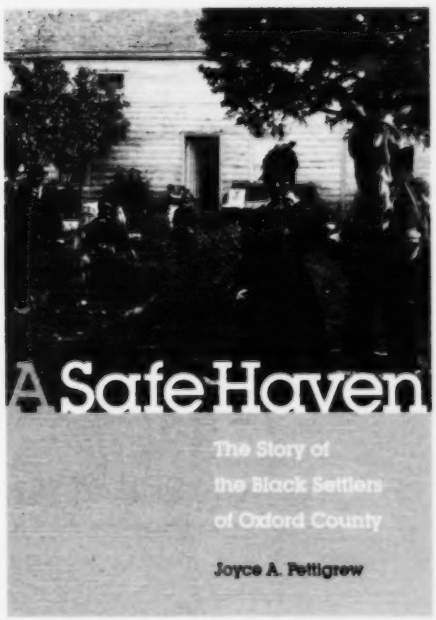
By 1831, nine Black veterans of the War of 1812 had accepted land grants near Barrie, forming the only government-sponsored Black settlement in Upper Canada.

John Brown's Convention (Chatham-Kent)

In May 1858, American abolitionist John Brown held a three-day series of meetings in Chatham to organize support for his plan to liberate the southern slaves.

Publications





The Hanging of Angelique by Dr. Afua Cooper. This book tells the story of Marie-Joseph Angelique – a 29-year-old slave who was tortured and hanged in Montreal on April 10, 1734 for allegedly starting a fire that engulfed over 40 buildings in Montreal. *The Hanging of Angelique* is arguably one of the oldest first-hand accounts of a slave's story, illustrating what slavery was like in Canada until its abolition in 1833.

The Book of Negroes by Lawrence Hill. This historical fiction highlights one child's journey from a village in West Africa to enslavement in South Carolina. After years of slavery, she volunteered to fight for the British during the American Revolution and was registered in the "Book of Negroes" – an actual British military document that recorded Loyalist slaves with the promise of land and resettlement in Nova Scotia. This young girl could not escape oppression wherever she went. Her journey ends with a stunning return to Sierra Leone.

I've got a Home in Glory Land: A lost tale of the Underground Railroad by Karolyn Smardz-Frost. This story retraces the path of two brave slaves, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, escaping slavery in Kentucky and journeying to their freedom in Canada. This story, set in 1831, details the epic story of one couple's struggle for freedom, including the dangers involved in the escape and the courage it took to start anew.

I Came as a Stranger by Bryan Prince. Prince provides a brief history of events and practices that led to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery, abolition, the Underground Railroad and life after freedom. Actual stories are recounted with many photographs included for younger readers.

A Safe Haven: The Story of Black Settlers in Oxford County by Joyce Pettigrew. This book tells a story of the first families in the Otterville area who sought security from the hardships of slavery and their past lives in Canada. This book attempts to recount the largely forgotten stories of these original settlers – who arrived in the 1830s with the help of Quakers from Norwich Township – and their descendents.

Websites

Archives of Ontario (www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/exhibits/black_history/settlement.htm)

This interactive website aims to break the silence surrounding the trans-atlantic slave trade by examining its causes and consequences. Breaking the Silence is a valuable educational resource that promotes mutual respect and intercultural dialogue.

Black History Canada (http://blackhistorycanada.ca/timeline.php?id=1800)

The Black History Canada website is a historical site that provides access to a wealth of information concerning Black history and the history of slavery in Canada.

Chatham-Kent Black Historic Society (www.mnsi.net/~wishc/heritageroom)

With a mission statement reading: "To develop an appreciation of the legacy of the past for the benefit of the caretakers of our future," the Chatham-Kent Black Historic Society provides the history of Chatham's Black community after travelling the Underground Railroad to freedom.

Grey Roots Museum (www.greyroots.com/exhibitions/virtual-exhibits/black-history)

The Grey Roots Museum website provides a history of the Black settlement patterns in the Queen's Bush. The virtual exhibit is based on their award winning exhibit From Slavery to Freedom: African-Canadians of Grey County.

Harriet Tubman Institute (www.yorku.ca/tubman/Home/index.html)

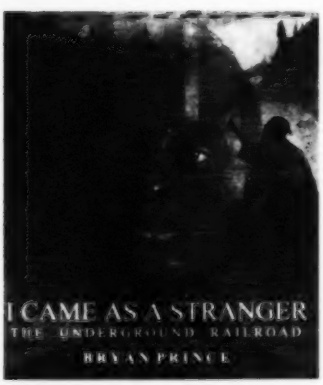
The Tubman Institute at York University is part of an international network that is committed to overcoming injustice and inequality resulting from slavery. Focusing on the movement of African peoples throughout the world, it is the mandate of the Tubman Institute to promote a greater understanding of the history of slavery and its ongoing legacy.

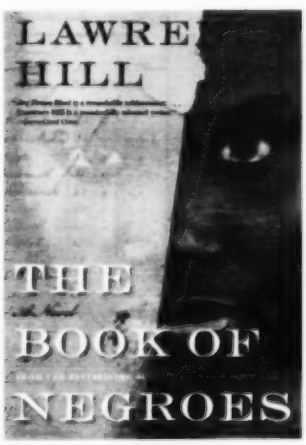
Ontario Black History Society (www.blackhistorysociety.ca)

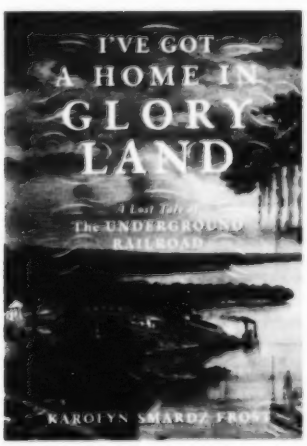
The Ontario Black History Society is a non-profit Canadian charity that is dedicated to the study, preservation and promotion of Black history and heritage.

Parks Canada (www.pc.gc.ca/index_E.asp)

The Parks Canada website has an abundance of historic information concerning the Underground Railroad, sites relevant to the Underground Railroad in Canada and Ontario and information about Black veterans of the War of 1812 given land by the Canadian government, leading to some of the first Black settlements in Canada and Ontario.







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Discover the achievements of Josiah Henson (Uncle Tom) through interactive exhibits, period artifacts and an interpretive video. Henson's dramatic escape from American slavery sets the background for your discovery of the trials and triumphs of freedom seekers on Canadian soil.

Explore the new interpretive exhibits in the Underground Railroad Freedom Gallery and North Star Theatre

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